



## ADDRESSING RACIAL TRAUMA

Systemic racism causes trauma in youth and adults, in rural communities and urban communities and impacts people of color as well as white people. Racism is a public health crisis and negatively affects the mental and physical health of millions of people, preventing them from attaining their highest level of health, and thus impacting the health of our nation. Research clearly shows that systemic racism negatively effects communities of color.

### Supporting Staff

Racial trauma refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. Racial trauma impacts the mental health of all of us, particularly staff of color. Supporting staff of color by recognizing the grief and emotions associated with racialized trauma can support the overall mental health of your staff teams and ultimately your communities.

### Leadership

Leadership is well positioned to address key issues on the minds of their staff. Staff of color are experiencing fear, stress, uncertainty, grief, and loss, so increased support and finding new ways to lead are essential.

**VALIDATE:** Acknowledge the disruption people and communities are experiencing. Recognize the impact of racialized trauma in communities and on staff.

**LEAD WITH EMPATHY:** Even if leaders do not have all the answers, calm reassurance and recognizing how these difficult times are impacting communities of color, including leaders of color, can create a supportive environment. In addition, understanding that an individual's racial identity may impact how they experience, feel and cope with stress and trauma and recognizing and acknowledging those differences is key.

### Y response on Link

Follow the [Responding to Community Trauma post](#) on Link for more information on keeping your Y and communities safe.

### Can you talk about Mental Health in the workplace?

Leaders, HR, and supervisors should check in often with staff regarding life and work. Supervisors and staff should also be open to conversations about how to support staff mental health, be proactive in approaching coworkers who may be struggling and be understanding if someone needs accommodations or time off work. Many organizations are looking to reduce the stigma of mental health and promote a culture of well-being in order to be more supportive of their staff. For example, the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) has a [StigmaFree Company campaign](#).

The La Crosse Family YMCA has free [Dinner Table Resilience](#) videos and skill sheets to support mental health conversations at work.

**CONVENE:** Leaders should **consider convening employees** to reassure in multiple ways including individually – to the extent feasible, in small groups, brave spaces (space where participants feel comfortable learning, sharing, and growing) online town hall meetings, and at organization wide forums.

Create space for employees to process and talk with each other in the wake of traumatic events. As part of the conversation, invite mental health professionals of color into the space to talk about healing from trauma. And if your Y offers mental health benefits, share information with your team on how to access these resources.

**SHOW COMPASSION:** Acknowledge the disruption people and communities are experiencing. Leaders set the tone and culture of organizations. They should remind people to take care of themselves and create an opportunity for staff and themselves to share what they are doing to stay healthy and well. This can demonstrate the organization's commitment to staff well-being, transparency and continuous communication.

**MAKE MENTAL HEALTH VISIBLE:** Now is the time for leaders to talk openly about mental health, a topic that has often stayed in the shadows and not been discussed openly.

Talk about how racism causes trauma and how that impacts mental health. Discuss how to connect with services and supports. When this is communicated from the highest level of organizations, it opens the door to employees feeling safe to seek care when it is needed.

**STRENGTHEN PREVENTION EFFORTS** that support mental health and well-being. Promote meditation, mindfulness, and coaching by offering staff apps to download or free online resources. Employers may also consider scheduling a virtual meeting with an expert offering guided meditation and mindfulness sessions so staff can learn how to use these tools on their own.

## Effective Communication

**LISTEN:** Be available to staff through these challenging times. Create reliable feedback loops for staff to share questions, concerns and to seek information on key issues. Create safe spaces for discussions with supervisors and peers and ask staff how they would like those spaces to be structured.

**MAKE IT ROUTINE:** Use regular (weekly if possible) check-ins to ask what support is needed and remind staff where they can

## EAP

Increase staff engagement with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Promote information about the EAP and the resources provided to staff and families through multiple communication channels like emails, newsletters, and weekly check-ins. With so much information coming out, it is good to rise above the noise by pushing out information often and repeatedly on how to *connect with the EAP*.

Review the mental health services offered through the EAP and consider adding additional options, like well-being coaching sessions, additional counseling sessions, online assessments, and information, 24-hour support, and on-demand crisis intervention. Consider expanding your EAP and health plan benefits to include free counseling sessions for staff.

Ask the EAP to expand the availability of online self-care tools focused on stress management, mindfulness, meditation, and resilience training. Ask whether the EAP intends to offer subscriptions to apps designed to address mental health and well-being issues.

Request the EAP vendor provide weekly aggregated data summarizing the number of staff accessing support, and the concerns, questions and

find resources on key topics like self-care, stress management, building resiliency, connecting to mental health care and more.

**BE A TRUSTED SOURCE:** Share mental health and well-being resources with staff. This can be done through emails, on the intranet, in newsletters and through other modes of communication.

- Discuss the value of self-awareness and encourage staff to **NOTICE** changes in themselves and/or others, **TALK** by checking in and letting them know that you care, and **ACT** by offering to connect them with services and supports.
- **Identify** someone at your Y that staff can contact to connect to for additional resources or services. Reaching out to a trusted individual is more supportive than providing a list of resources.

## Recommend Ways Staff Can Support Themselves

Share these self-care tips with your staff:

- Pay attention to how watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media may be affecting your health.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Also, recognize that many staff are caregivers and need resources to support their loved one's mental health. Consider additional resources on how to talk to youth regarding racism and mental health.

## Additional Resources and Information

- Psychology Today, [The Trauma of Racism](#)
- Reclaiming Journal, [The Trauma of Racism](#)
- CDC, [Racism and Health](#)
- MHA, [Racial Trauma](#)
- [Coping with Racial Trauma](#)
- [Support Black Employees Experiencing Racial Trauma](#)
- [BIPOC Mental Health Toolkit](#)
- [Race, Mental Health and Equity](#)
- [Black Emotional and Mental Health](#)
- [Asian Mental Health Collective](#)
- MHA, [Asian American/Pacific Islander Communities and Mental Health](#)
- [How Right Now](#)
- [PsychHub](#)

conditions being raised. This allows you to know what staff are experiencing and to proactively support managers in working with their teams.

Collaborate with the EAP to create solutions that work if there is a spike in requests for support or if there is not, to find new and innovative ways to reach staff with support.

Request the EAP's plan for handling increased requests for support. Ask how the EAP is making referrals to mental health professionals and triaging needs as the demand for mental health care rises.

Set regular meetings with the EAP to strategize on new online trainings, apps, and other tools to meet the needs of your staff.

Read [Workplace Mental Health](#) to see how the YMCA of Greater Rochester adjusted their communication of EAP to increase engagement.

*This information is for educational purposes only, and should not be used in place of medical advice. Please consult a medical or mental health professional if you are concerned about your health or mental and emotional well-being.*